

# REPRESENTATIONS OF BRAZILIAN FOLKLORE IN "MACUNAÍMA," BY MÁRIO DE ANDRADE:

Amanda Baratela<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Affiliation: Faculdade de Letras, Instituto de Ciências Humanas, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil, baratela.revisao@gmail.com.

**Abstract.** This article analyses the theme of folklore in Mário de Andrade's book "Macunaíma: a hero with no character". To dissert it, I relied on theorists from the literary and linguistic fields. With the aim to observe the impact and intentions of the author in incorporating elements of Brazilian folklore into the work. The research follows the documentary research method and uses as reference some authors such as Bosi, Propp, and others. My research and analysis results indicate: (i) the development of Brazilian folklore concept through time; (ii) the folklore as a representation of Brazilian cultural identity, revealing genuine traits in opposition to European erudition and its role in the work. (iii) All this work is based on reading of "Macunaíma: a hero with no character", as a literacy student aiming to understand how the multiple Brazilian narratives are collocated inside the book. Adding to the representations that Andrade's work still has on Brazilian culture until the actual days, representing our past, present and future social.

**Keywords.** Macunaíma, Mário de Andrade, Brazilian Folklore, Literacy, Tales, Hero's Journey.

## 1. Introduction

This article originated from the reading of Mário de Andrade's (2022) work "Macunaíma: a hero with no character" (1), along with the studies and the analyses conducted during the course "Brazilian Literature: History and Critique". It was ministered by the Doctor in Literature, Marcia Marques (PUC Minas), during the graduation course of Letras. The analyzed work condenses the oral and folk traditions of Brazil. For those familiar with Brazilian culture and with its origins, the reading of "Macunaíma" allows them to identify at least some of the stories interwoven in Macunaíma's narrative.

My goal is to analyze the folk manifestations in Mário de Andrade's work, focusing on how Brazilian traditional stories are incorporated into the narrative of the hero Macunaíma. (2) The book was written in 1928, and Andrade was at the time a prominent figure in Brazilian Modernism. The book has a national character, a critical origin, and addresses the aspects with a touch of ironic humor, with the main character assuming the role of an anti-hero. The character represents the Brazilian people, a narrator who portrays the negative side of the hero. Andrade's intention was primarily to question the cultural submissiveness and the importation of models from various foreign spheres, economically, socially and culturally.

## 2. Macunaíma: the hero in the fairy tale

"Macunaíma" is a well-known Brazilian novel written by Mário de Andrade. Published firstly in 1928, it is considered one of the foundational works of Brazilian modernism. The novel is a unique blend of folklore, mythology, and urban life, and it tells the story of the eponymous character, Macunaíma, a mischievous and cunning hero born in the heart of the Brazilian forest. The novel follows Macunaíma adventures, who is born at a strange night. He hails from the Amazon rainforest and possesses various supernatural abilities, including the power to transform his appearance and speak multiple languages. Macunaíma embarks on a grow up journey from the remote forest to the city, specifically São Paulo. Where he encounters the complexities of urban life and the clash between the modern and the traditional. Along the way, he is joined by his two brothers, Maanape and Jiguê, who represent different aspects of Brazilian social culture and identity.

The novel is filled with magical and surreal elements, as Macunaíma navigates encounters with various characters. Including the mischievous giant Piaimã, the seductive and treacherous Vei, and the

shapeshifting witch Ci. Macunaíma's adventures are both humorous and thought-provoking, exploring themes of cultural identity, Brazilian folklore, and the impact of modernity on traditional values. Throughout his journey, Macunaíma seeks to retrieve a magical stone, the "mairaquitã," which was stolen from him. The stone is a symbol of his quest for self-discovery and the restoration of his identity.

Mário de Andrade's "Macunaíma" is celebrated for its innovative narrative style, rich use of Brazilian folklore, and its contribution to the development of Brazilian literature. It remains an essential work in the canon of Brazilian modernist literature, and its themes continue to resonate with readers interested in the cultural and social complexities of Brazil.

Starting with the theory of Vladimir Propp's (1984) book "Morphology of the Folktale" (3), he provides a method for describing folktales based on their constituent parts, their relationships, and their overall structure. In the chapter "Method and Material" of the book, Propp discusses the constant and variable elements found in the selected material. According to Propp, what changes are the names and attributes of the characters, but what remains constant are their actions. Propp prefers to use the term "functions" instead of actions. He asserts that folktales assign consistent actions to different characters, allowing us to study tales based on the functions of the characters. The constituent parts of folktales are precisely the functions of the characters representing them.

Although Propp's study focuses on functions rather than the characters who perform them, he presents an analysis of the distribution of functions among the characters in the chapter "Distribution of Functions among the Characters". These functions can be grouped into specific spheres, which to some extent correspond to the characters who perform them. Propp categorized the spheres of action into seven types: the Antagonist's sphere of action, the Donor's sphere of action, the Helper's sphere of action, the Princess's (sought-after character) and her father's sphere of action, the Dispatcher's sphere of action, the Hero's sphere of action, and the False Hero's sphere of action.

In "Macunaíma" by Mário de Andrade, we observe that the main character assumes the role of a hero in the narrative. However, his actions and deeds go against the moral and ethical precepts of the society he is a part of. Therefore, we can say that the character dances between the so-called Hero and Protagonist spheres, according to Propp's theory.

This analogy can be made based on an excerpt from Eneida Maria de Souza's (1999) book "A pedra mágica do discurso" (4): "Macunaíma, in the literary condition of satirizing Brazil through himself, translates his portrait in which the negative corresponds to the parodied texts, reading Brazil as an exposure of rhetoric that, while beautifying discourse, hides the true face". In this way, we can

understand the performance of the main character by considering the context of the work's production, rather than limiting ourselves solely to the rhapsodic narrative. Thus, within the composition of Propp's Hero sphere, we can grasp Macunaíma's antagonistic movement in a satirical manner.

### 3. Folklore under the Brazilian definition

Folklore is a culturally constructed product of human society, and its definition is abstract due to its proximity to the characteristics of popular culture. The study of Brazilian folklore had one of its pioneers in Mário de Andrade himself, who sought to establish a dialogue between this manifestation and the human sciences, portraying it as an expression of Brazilian's culture.

The trajectory of folklore studies in Brazil is related to the debates in the European intellectual context. Brazilian scholars also incorporated these two traditions into their work, aiming to add scientific rigor to their studies. Among the pioneers of these studies in the country were authors like Sílvio Romero (1851-1914), Amadeu Amaral (1875-1929), and Mário de Andrade (1893-1945) (5).

In 1955, the Brazilian Folklore Charter was approved, defining folklore as the set of cultural creations of a community, based on its individual or collective traditions, representing its social identity. This is what Andrade sought to express in his representation of Macunaíma's Brazilianness.

In line with Cavalcanti, Rosalia Pirolli (2016) in her master's thesis "Popular Culture and Folklore in Macunaíma, by Mário de Andrade, and Histórias de Alexandre, by Graciliano Ramos", discusses the importance of oral literatures, such as folklore, and their representativeness for the formation and preservation of national identity. Let's see (6):

Popular productions should not only be seen as uncultured material - although there was still an accent on the "rusticity" or "primitivism" of the people - but as the genuine manifestation of the national spirit. Therefore, properly recorded and systematized oral literatures, by intellectuals and scholars of the time, came to constitute the very body of literature, serving to support the already mentioned idea

of national "soul" and providing the symbolic foundation that had been lacking until then in the notion of the nation. (Pirolli, 2016, p. 26)

#### 4. Folkloric manifestations in the work

In Mário de Andrade's work, it was possible to identify the significant presence of some folk elements and their respective narratives adapted to the plot of Macunaíma throughout the entire reading (4):

(...) The material used by Mário de Andrade in the structural elaboration of Macunaíma consists of a diversity of constructive elements, extracted from various texts. This procedure involves the reappropriation of mechanisms from the popular songbook through which, starting from a basic theme, infinite variations are introduced, escape points that form the score of a plural writing. (Souza, 1999, p. 44)

For example, in a passage from the scene in which Macunaíma is pursuing the Muiraquitã amulet and fleeing from the giant Venceslau Pietro Pietra, in the chapter "The Frenchwoman and the Giant", Macunaíma encounters Caterina, a little black wax doll. The hero does not realize he is not facing a living being who can respond and starts a one-sided argument with the wax doll (1):

Caterina, no response. Macunaíma, somewhat annoyed with her, whispered:  
Caterina, get out of there, or I'll hit you!  
The little mulatto doll just stayed there. So, Macunaíma gave her a strong slap and his hand got stuck to her.  
Caterina, let go of my hand and go away, or I'll give you another slap, Caterina! (Andrade, 2022, p. 93)

In a way, the construction of this scene resembles the tale "O macaco e o moleque de cera", included in the third part of Silvio Romero's (2018) book "Popular Tales of Brazil" (7). The scene in this tale is as follows: "The monkey said: 'Boy, let go of my hand, or I'll give you another slap!' And the boy remained silent... The monkey climbed up the boy and got his hand stuck to the wax." (Romero, 2018, p. 254).

In this tale, it is the monkey who gets stuck to the wax boy, a story whose origin is mostly unknown but circulates predominantly orally in our country. This can be justified by the strong presence of folk legends that have been constructed and passed down through generations for many years.

When comparing the two scenes, we can identify that despite the change in characters, the structure, actions, and the way the scenes are described all evoke similarities between them. We also observe the aggression with which the character with life and speech treats the object with which he is interacting. Furthermore, we notice a progression in both scenes, indicating an evolution in the level of restriction of movements for both Macunaíma and the monkey.

In addition to the tale, we will now discuss the presence of another typical Brazilian folklore story, that of the "Curupira", known for deceiving hunters and loggers entering the forests in search of harming Brazilian fauna and flora. As the folkloric character has feet that are turned backward, he always misled humans pursuing him, indicating the opposite direction through the tracks left behind.

In Mário de Andrade's work, Macunaíma is in the forest because he is already lost in the "Cafundó do Judas" wilderness, a consequence of deceiving his family, leading his mother to abandon him.

When we read the scene where Macunaíma encounters the Curupira, early in the narrative, we identify a pattern in how the hero relates to other folkloric elements and nature. We notice that he most often refers to them with some aspect of kinship. In the case of Curupira, he is addressed as his grandfather, and in the case of Cotia, who appears shortly after, as his grandmother. This, in a way, could be connected to the roots of the Brazilian hero, recognizing them as part of his origin and cultural heritage.

#### 5. Final Considerations

In conclusion, we find that Mário de Andrade conducted meticulous work in his book "Macunaíma" by incorporating overlay Brazilian folklore narratives. He aimed to make them a part of the journey of the national hero, Macunaíma. Through this research and analysis, it was possible to comprehend influences of hero's mythology, from the European theoretical, Propp. Coming into de

nowadays, establishing at the Brazilian's territory, with the typical folklore tales. A variety of stories that are part of our culture, social and history. Myths that are put together at Mario de Andrade's masterpiece, "Macunaíma: o herói sem nenhum caráter/Macunaíma: a hero with no character".

## 6. Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my academic professor, Alexandre Veloso de Abreu, who orientated me thought my journey in English Literature, during my Letras course, at PUC University.

## 7. References

- (1) Andrade, Mário de. Macunaíma: o herói sem nenhum caráter - 2nd ed. - Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio Editora, 2022. ISBN 978-65-5847-065-6.
- (2) Bosi, Alfredo. História concisa da literatura brasileira. - 50th ed. - São Paulo: Ed. Cultrix, 2015.
- (3) Propp, Vladimir. Morfologia do conto maravilhoso. Trad. Jasna Paravich Sarhan. Rio de Janeiro: Forense-Universitária, 1984.
- (4) Souza, Eneida Maria de. A pedra mágica do discurso. - 2nd ed. rev. e ampl. - Belo Horizonte: Ed. UFMG, 1999. ISBN: 85-7041-167-7.
- (5) Cavalcanti, M. L. Entendendo o Folclore. Available at: <http://www.museudofolclore.com.br/>. Accessed on May 17, 2022.
- (6) Pirolli, Rosalia Rita Evaldt. Cultura Popular e Folclore em Macunaíma, de Mário de Andrade, e Histórias de Alexandre, de Graciliano Ramos. Curitiba: Universidade do Paraná (dissertação), 2016.
- (7) Romero, Sílvio. Contos de origem africana e mestiça. In: Contos populares do Brasil. Jundiaí: Cadernos do Mundo Inteiro, 2018.